

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

Please cancel without prejudice claim 6 and amend claims 1, 21, 27 and 35 as follows.

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

1. (currently amended) Apparatus for modifying the shape of an aircraft component, the apparatus including a shaped surface so arranged that an aircraft component may be forced against the shaped surface in a manner that modifies the shape of the aircraft component, wherein the apparatus further includes an intermediate member that in use receives and supports the component, is positioned between the shaped surface and the component, and deforms to a shape dependent on the shape of the shaped surface, wherein the shaped surface is defined by an open structure, the open structure including elements separated by gaps, the shape to which the component may be modified being dependent on the shape defined by the notional smooth surface enveloping the elements and bridging the gaps, the intermediate member being sufficiently stiff that in use during the forcing of the aircraft component against the shaped surface, the intermediate member deforms substantially to the shape of said notional smooth surface, but suffers substantially no local deformation in regions of the intermediate member that bridge the gaps.

2. (original) An apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the intermediate member is generally sheet-like in shape.

3. (original) An apparatus according to claim 2, wherein the intermediate member has a constant thickness across the majority of its area.

4. (previously presented) An apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the intermediate member is, prior to use of the apparatus, substantially flat.

5. (previously presented) An apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the intermediate member is such that it may repeatedly deform to substantially the same shape, that shape being dependent on the shape of the shaped surface.

6. (cancelled).

7. (previously presented) An apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the intermediate layer is arranged to be free to move over the shaped surface within predefined boundaries.

8. (previously presented) An apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the apparatus is arranged such that the aircraft component is free to move in directions substantially parallel to the shaped surface.

9. (original) An apparatus according to claim 8, wherein the apparatus is arranged such that, in use, the aircraft component is prevented from moving beyond predefined boundaries.

10. (previously presented) An apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the shaped surface comprises an open structure.

11. (original) An apparatus according to claim 10, wherein the open structure comprises a multiplicity of spaced apart elements and the shape to which the component may be modified is dependent on the shape defined by a notional surface that envelopes the elements.

12. (previously presented) An apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the shaped surface is defined by a multiplicity of separate elements.

13. (original) An apparatus according to claim 12, wherein the elements are arranged in groups, each group comprising a plurality of elements, the elements in each group being mounted in fixed relation to each other.

14. (previously presented) An apparatus according to claim 11, wherein the elements are in the form of ribs.

15. (previously presented) An apparatus according to claim 11, wherein the elements are removably mounted on the apparatus.

16. (previously presented) An apparatus according to claim 11, wherein the elements are fixed in position on the apparatus by means of a portion of the element that engages with a corresponding portion of the apparatus, the portions and corresponding portions being shaped such that they do not restrict movement of the elements away from the apparatus.

17. (previously presented) An apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the shaped surface is rigid.

18. (previously presented) An apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the apparatus is arranged such that the component is, in use, forced against the shaped surface by means of an air pressure difference.

19. (original) An apparatus according to claim 18, wherein the air pressure difference is at least partially provided by suction.

20. (original) An apparatus according to claim 19, wherein the suction is provided via a bag of a bagging apparatus.

21. (original) Apparatus for modifying the shape of an aircraft component, the apparatus including a shaped surface so arranged that an aircraft component may be forced against the shaped surface in a manner that modifies the shape of the aircraft component, wherein the apparatus is arranged such that the component is, in use, forced against the shaped surface by means of an air pressure difference that is at least partially provided by suction via a bag of a bagging apparatus, wherein the shaped surface is defined by an open structure, the open structure

including elements separated by gaps, the shape to which the component may be modified being dependent on the shape defined by the notional smooth surface enveloping the elements and bridging the gaps, the intermediate member being sufficiently stiff that in use during the forcing of the aircraft component against the shaped surface, the intermediate member deforms substantially to the shape of said notional smooth surface, but suffers substantially no local deformation in regions of the intermediate member that bridge the gaps.

22. (previously presented) An apparatus according to claim 20, wherein the apparatus is arranged such that the bag, in use, must encompass both the aircraft component and at least a portion of the apparatus on the opposite side of the shaped surface to the aircraft component.

23. (previously presented) An apparatus according to claim 20, wherein the apparatus includes a base which supports the shaped surface and the apparatus is arranged such that the bag, in use, must at least partially be sealingly attached to the base.

24. (previously presented) An apparatus according to claim 20, wherein the bag is reusable.

25. (previously presented) An apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the apparatus is in the form of a creep-forming tool.

26. (previously presented) An apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the apparatus is arranged so that it is suitable for modifying the shape of metallic components.

27. (original) A method of modifying the shape of an aircraft component, the method including the steps of

providing a shaped surface and an intermediate member, wherein the shaped surface is defined by an open structure, the open structure including elements separated by gaps, the shape to which the component may be modified being dependent on the shape defined by the notional

smooth surface enveloping the elements and bridging the gaps, the intermediate member being sufficiently stiff that in use during the forcing of the aircraft component against the shaped surface, the intermediate member deforms substantially to the shape of said notional smooth surface, but suffers substantially no local deformation in regions of the intermediate member that bridge the gaps,

forcing an aircraft component against the shaped surface, via the intermediate member, in a manner that modifies the shape of the aircraft component, and

removing the aircraft component.

28. (original) A method according to claim 27, wherein immediately prior to the performance of the step of forcing the component against the shaped surface, the intermediate member is substantially flat.

29. (previously presented) A method according to claim 27, wherein the method is performed a multiplicity of times and the same intermediate member is used on each occasion.

30. (previously presented) A method according to claim 27, wherein the step of forcing of the aircraft component against the shaped surface causes the aircraft component to undergo plastic deformation.

31. (previously presented) A method according to claim 27, wherein the method includes a step of releasing the component from the shaped surface and after the release of the component the shape of the component changes significantly.

32. (previously presented) A method according to claim 27, wherein, before performance of the step of forcing of the aircraft component against the shaped surface, the aircraft component is generally flat in shape.

33. (previously presented) A method according to claim 27, wherein, during performance of the step of forcing of the aircraft component against the shaped surface, the aircraft component slides over the shaped surface within predefined boundaries.

34. (previously presented) A method according to claim 27, wherein the aircraft component is forced against the shaped surface by means of an air pressure difference.

35. (original) A method of modifying the shape of an aircraft component, the method including the steps of

providing a shaped surface, supported by a support structure, wherein the shaped surface is defined by an open structure, the open structure including elements separated by gaps, the shape to which the component may be modified being dependent on the shape defined by the notional smooth surface enveloping the elements and bridging the gaps, the intermediate member being sufficiently stiff that in use during the forcing of the aircraft component against the shaped surface, the intermediate member deforms substantially to the shape of said notional smooth surface, but suffers substantially no local deformation in regions of the intermediate member that bridge the gaps

forcing, by means of an air pressure difference, an aircraft component against the shaped surface in a manner that modifies the shape of the aircraft component, and

removing the aircraft component, wherein the air pressure difference is at least partially provided by suction via a bag of a bagging apparatus, the bag encompassing both the aircraft component and at least a portion of the support structure on the opposite side of the shaped surface to the aircraft component.

36. (original) A method according to claim 35, wherein the shape of a further aircraft component is modified by performing the method with the use of the same bag.

37. (previously presented) A method of creep forming a metallic component including performing the steps of the method of claim 27.

38. (previously presented) An aircraft component formed by use of an apparatus according to claim 1.

39. (original) An aircraft including an aircraft component according to claim 38.